

Message Text

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ACTION SCI-06

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 EA-11 ISO-00 L-03 IO-14 COA-02 ACDA-19

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R 172050Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4697

INFO NSF WASHDC

USCINCSO

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 9138

JOINT EMBASSY/DAO/USMILGP MESSAGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: TGEN, AR, US, MARR, XV

SUBJECT: ANTARCTICA, AGREEMENT ON MARAMBIO AIRFIELD

REFS: (A) BA 7857; (B) BA 7188; (C) BA 5843

(D) STATE 19145

1. SUMMARY. BECAUSE OF CURRENT AAF POSITION, GOA NOT PRESENTLY WILLING TO PROCEED EVEN WITH EXCHANGE OF NOTES. UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES, EMBASSY PROPOSES LET MATTERS REST UNTIL FURTHER INITIATIVE FORTHCOMING FROM EITHER GOA OR NSF. END SUMMARY.

2. FONOFF HAS INFORMED EMBOFF THAT ARGENTINE AF (AAF) WISHES HOLD IN ABEYANCE ANY PROPOSED AGREEMENT ON MARAMBIO. FONOFF DIRGEN FOR ANTARCTICA (BLANCO) INDICATED HE WOULD PURSUE LOW KEY CONTACTS WITH ARGENTINE AF TO ATTEMPT ASCERTAIN REASONS FOR ITS POSITION. BLANCO STATED THAT HE PERSONALLY THOUGHT AGREEMENT WAS IN BEST INTERESTS OF GOA.

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3. AAF PREVIOUSLY HAD INFORMED CHIEF AFSEC ARGENTINA THAT IT

HAD CHANGED ITS POSITION AND IS NOW OPPOSED TO ANY EXCHANGE OF NOTES. THE REASON GIVEN FOR THE CHANGE WAS THAT AT PRESENT IT IS NOT POLITICALLY ADVISABLE TO BE A PARTY TO ANY US/GOA AGREEMENT OF THIS TYPE SINCE IT INEVITABLY WOULD BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND IS COUNTER TO THE PRESENT PUBLIC GOA POLICY OF SEEKING INDEPENDENCE IN MATTERS OF THIS TYPE AND COULD, THEREFORE, BE DAMAGING TO THE AAF. NO OBJECTION WAS VOICED TO COOPERATION ON MARAMBIO AS HAS BEEN PROPOSED DURING THE ENTIRE COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS, BUT AAF AT PRESENT WILL NOT AGREE TO ANY FORM OF AGREEMENT AT THE GOVERNMENT LEVEL.

4. THE CHIEF AFSEC HAD RESPONDED THAT, IN HIS PERSONAL OPINION, IF THERE WAS NO AGREEMENT OF SOME TYPE THERE WOULD BE NO ALUMINUM MATTING FROM THE NSF/USG FOR THE RUNWAY. THERE WAS SOME CONFUSION ON THE PART OF THE AAF THAT THE ALUMINUM WAS TO BE GIVEN AND NOT LOANED AND THEY THOUGHT PERHAPS IT COULD BE OBTAINED UNDER MAP. THIS MISUNDERSTANDING WAS CLEARED UP AND IT WAS EXPLAINED THAT THE ONLY OTHER KNOWN SOURCE FOR ONE MILLION SQUARE FEET OF ALUMINUM MATTING WAS FROM A CIVILIAN MANUFACTURER AT AN APPROXIMATE COST OF 4.5 MILLION DOLLARS.

5. EMBASSY AND MISSION BELIEVE THAT THE RELUCTANCE OF THE AAF TO BE INVOLVED IN ANYNKG/GOA AGREEMENT IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE LOCAL POLITICAL SITUATION AND NOT TO A DESIRE TO EVADE GIVING A DUE RETURN FOR THE USE OF ALUMINUM MATTING. THE AAF HAS CONTINUALLY STRESSED FROM THE OUTSET THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE ACTIVITIES REGARDING MARAMBIO CONFIDENTIAL OR SECRET. AN EXCHANGE OF NOTES COULD NOT, IN AAF VIEW, BE KEPT IN THIS CATEGORY, AND COULD HAVE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES FOR AAF OFFICIALS AND FOR THE AAF PUBLIC IMAGE IF THE AGREEMENT BECAME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE. SEE BA 5843 FOR DISCUSSION.

6. DEPARTMENT AND NSF WILL RECALL HIGHLY PUBLICIZED FLIGHT OF ARGENTINE PROV. PRESIDENT LASTIRI AND CABINET TO MARAMBIO. RECENT AAF TRANSPOLAR FLIGHT VIA MARAMBIO TO AUSTRALIA BEING BILLED HERE AS FURTHER EXPRESSION OF ARGENTINE SOVEREIGNTY OVER ANTARTIC, BUT ALSO BEING EMPLOYED BY AAF TO DRUM UP SUPPORT WITHIN GOA FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO MARAMBIO. THUS, AAF CHIEF FAUTARIO, WHO COMMANDED TRANSPOLAR FLIGHT, STATED IN CONFIDENTIAL

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SUBSEQUENT PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE EXPECTED TO GAIN SUPPORT FROM PRESIDENT PERON AND ECONOMY MINISTER GELBARD FOR MARAMBIO IMPROVEMENTS. FAUTARIO STATED THAT PRESENT MARAMBIO 1200 METER RUNWAY WOULD BE EXTENDED TO 2100 METERS AND EMPLOY ALUMINUM MATTING. HE ALSO PREDICTED THAT, WITHIN FOUR YEARS MARAMBIO WOULD HAVE A SCIENTIFIC STATION, AN ANARTIC REGIONAL HOSPITAL, A BASE FOR LARGE HELICOPTERS, A FUELS PLANT, AND PASSENGER INSTALLATIONS. POSSIBLE FUTURE

USE FOR COMMERCIAL DIRECT FLIGHTS ARGENTINA TO AUSTRALIA
BEING STRESSED BY AAF, EVEN FOR FLIGHTS ORIGINATING IN US
OR EUROPE TO AUSTRALIA VIA BUENOS AIRES.

7. COMMENT. DEPARTMENT AND NSF SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THERE IS
GOOD LIKELIHOOD THAT AAF WILL PROCEED WITH MARAMBIO IMPROVEMENTS
WITH OR WITHOUT USG-SUPPLIED MATTING. PROBABILITY EXISTS
THAT, IF AAF COMES UP WITH FUNDS, IT WOULD PURCHASE MATTING
COMMERCIALY, PROBABLY FROM US SUPPLIER. UNLESS DE-
PARTMENT AND NSF WILLING, BASED ON ABOVE DEVELOPMENTS HERE,
TO RECONSIDER NEED FOR EXCHANGE OF NOTES, EMBASSY SEES NO
CHOICE BUT LET MATTER RIDE FOR PRESENT AND REOPEN ONLY
IN CASE OF FURTHER ARGENTINE INITIATIVE OR IN CASE NSF
DECIDES MARAMBIO IMPROVEMENTS AND ITS INVOLVEMENT THERE
RATE HIGHER ORDER PRIORITY THAN WE UNDERSTAND IT NOW GIVES THEM.
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